



via pacis

Newsletter of the Des Moines Catholic Worker Community



photo by Chuck Trapkus

Mother and Child: Young Zeminixia and her mother in the emergency room at Saddam Children's Hospital in Baghdad, Iraq. Zeminixia has pneumonia, anemia, and malnutrition.

Infant Narrative: Two Stories, One Important Theme

by Frank Cordaro

Each year at this time I go through the same mental struggle with the Christmas story and how we celebrate Jesus' birth. For me this struggle is best symbolized by the nativity displays set up in our churches. It frustrates my scriptural sensitivities to no end when the elements of two distinct biblical birth stories — one in the Gospel of Matthew, one in Luke — are casually combined into one nativity setting. While both accounts cover similar concerns, make similar theological points, and rely heavily on Old Testament themes and text, the "way" in which they tell the story is quite different. These infant narratives are basically individualized "theological introductions" telling us something about the Jesus we are to meet later on in the story. As such, they deserve to be read and studied separately.

Matthew's Infant Narrative

The infant narrative in Matthew's Gospel, two chapters long, consists of a genealogy and five scenes that tell the story of Jesus' birth.

Matthew's genealogy begins with Abraham and basically tries to demonstrate Jesus' hereditary links to King David and even back to Abraham. Luke, the only other Gospel with a genealogy, links Jesus all the way back to Adam and Eve. Matthew and Luke's genealogies are not the same. They are worth studying at length.

First Scene: Birth of Jesus

Matt. 1:18-25: While Mary was betrothed to Joseph, but before she moved into his home, she was found to be with child. Joseph was not the father. Being a "righteous" man, not wanting to expose Mary to the shame of her situation, Joseph intended to divorce her quietly until an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream. The angel told Joseph not to fear, but to take Mary into his home as his wife anyway. The child conceived in Mary was by the Holy Spirit. Joseph is to name the boy child Jesus. All this is being done to fulfill what God had foretold through the prophet Isaiah. (Is. 7:14)

Joseph awakes from his dream and does as the angel commanded. Joseph took Mary into his home and had no sexual relations with her before the child was born. When the boy was born, Joseph named him Jesus. This all took place in Bethlehem where Joseph and Mary lived. Jesus' actual birth is recorded in less than one verse, a part of a verse, "she bore a son." (Matt. 1:25)

In Matthew's story, Joseph is the main character. The story is told from his perspective. It's a man's perspective; it's a man's story. Matthew's in-

fant story will reveal how the political world, the "powers and principalities" will receive the Lord.

Scene Two: The Birth Announcement

Matt. 2:1-12: If Jesus' actual birth seemed low-key, his birth announcement was anything but. Magi from the East showed up in Jerusalem on King Herod's doorstep asking, "Where is the newborn King of the Jews? We saw his star at its rising and have come to do him homage." (Matt. 2:2) This star was Jesus' cosmic birth announcement. The attention it attracts will have far-reaching geopolitical ramifications.

In the cultural world of the first century, magi were a caste of very high-ranking political-religious advisors to the rulers of the Median and Persian empires (roughly equivalent to the modern countries of Iran and Iraq.) They were schooled in all the sciences including astrology.

When the Magi and their entourage showed up in Jerusalem following a newborn star, the customary sign of a newborn king, King Herod and all of Jerusalem were "greatly troubled" (Matt. 2:3). It was a trickle-down concern from King Herod to his royal household, to the priests and scribes, to his servants and handmaids, to the people of Jerusalem.

Who could this newborn King of the Jews be, this so-called Messiah? This was not good news for King Herod. He had no need for competition; he was the King of the Jews by the graces of Rome. Any other King of the Jews would be a direct threat to him and his Roman sponsors.

Herod called all his holy wise men together to determine where this rival king was to be born. The chief priest and scribes turned to their holy book, the scriptures and found where the prophet Micah foretold to Bethlehem a great ruler shall be born.

Herod instructs the magi to go to Bethlehem to find their king, do him homage and then return to Jerusalem to let him know where to find the newborn king so he could do him homage too. The magi left Jerusalem and headed for Bethlehem. The star they were following preceded them. When they arrived in Bethlehem, the star came to rest directly over the house where the child king was. They entered the house, saw the child with his mother, did him homage and gave him three gifts; gold, frankincense and myrrh.

The three gifts: The first was gold, a practical gift, one that would be useful for the hard times ahead. However, this gift was not given for its practicality but for what it symbolized: Jesus' kingly majesty. The second, frankincense, a kind of incense, symbolized Jesus' divine connection. Lastly, myrrh, a morbid gift, was the aromatic gum resin used to anoint dead bod-

ies before burials. Even at this joyful occasion, the birth of Jesus, the story wants to remind us of what is ahead, for this child king will be put to death, crucified for the sins of all.

Told in a dream — the angels doing again — not to return to Jerusalem for Herod has no good in store for the newborn child king, the magi return home by another route.

Scene Three: Flight into Egypt

Matt. 2:13-15: Joseph is told in a dream by an angel to get out of town, quick, that night! Herod is out to kill the child Jesus. Joseph, the action-hero character in our story, wastes no time. He heads for Egypt, the nearest super-

power border. Joseph is following in the footsteps of his Old Testament counterpart, the other Joseph, son of Jacob, reader of dreams and provider for his family in Egypt. Overnight the Holy Family become political refugees. One wonders how they survived their forced exile in this strange new land. Were they classified as illegal aliens? The text is silent on such matters.

Scene Four: The Massacre of the Infants

Matt. 2:16-18: Herod soon finds out he's been tricked by the Eastern wise guys. He makes a strategic decision, a preemptive strike. He sends his storm

Continued on next page



photo by Chuck Trapkus
Iraqi mother and infant, Uhl Ahmed, who suffers from respiratory distress syndrome at Saddam Children's Hospital in Baghdad.

Appeal to compassion

End the Sanctions

"We appeal to all Catholic and to all Christians in America and the world. The sanctions are killing our people, our children, our beloved Muslim brothers and sisters. They strike at our poor and our sick most of all. In the name of God's people we ask you: tell your government to end the sanctions against Iraq. End the seven years of war against Iraq."

— Message from the Catholic Bishops of Baghdad, Christmas 1997

"Whatever you do to the least of my people, you do to me," Jesus taught. As sanctions against Iraq kill children by the thousands each month, Jesus is being rejected again, just as He was in Bethlehem long ago when his mother, Mary, gave birth in a barn because the world had no room and no use for her or for her child. "It is no use saying that we are born 2,000 years too late to give room for Christ," Dorothy Day wrote. Let us celebrate the birth of Jesus, giving welcome and shelter to him and to his mother by resisting the sanctions that murder Iraqi children and their mothers.

— Brian Terrell

Strangers and Guests, Catholic Worker, Maloy Iowa



"Where is the child who has been born king of the Jews? For we observed his star at its rising and have come to pay him homage?" Matthew 2.2

Important Announcement

If the United States and its allies resume missile attacks against the people of Iraq, a demonstration in protest of the action will be held at the Federal Building in Des Moines at 5:00 p.m. on the day of the bombing. If bombing begins in the evening, the demonstration will take place the following day at 5:00 p.m. For more information, contact American Friends Service Committee at 515-274-4851.

Hurricane Mitch disaster offers opportunity to forgive debt and correct U.S. Central America policy

Editors' Note: The following was compiled and submitted to via pacis by Fr. Kevin Cameron. While the DMCW promotes personalist rather than "government solutions," we encourage readers to contact the people listed below as a way to help alleviate some of the suffering of our sisters and brothers in Central America.

Hurricane Georges and Mitch have wreaked havoc upon the people of Haiti, the Dominican Republic, Honduras, Nicaragua, Guatemala, El Salvador, southern Mexico and beyond. In recent weeks, relief efforts have come in from many countries. Donations are still critically important. You might make a contribution to Catholic Relief Services or the American Red Cross in the name of someone as an alternative to buying a Christmas present.

Another way to help the immediate problems is to write or call Senator Grassley's office, Senator Harkin's office and your Representative's Office with two federal needs. The first is to forgive the debt to these countries. As you may well know, these disasters have set the people back 50 years. They will never be able to pay the debt back to the World Bank or the International Monetary Fund. They need to be spending their money on food, medicine, shelter, rebuilding the infrastructure and much more. The Pope has already taken the initiative that as we approach the Year of Jubilee to forgive the debt and start anew. France, Britain, Spain and Cuba have already forgiven the debt to these countries. The United States needs to do the same.

This is a decision of Congress and the President. Please contact them.

The second issue is to push for Temporary Protective Status for those living in this country and who are in deportation proceedings. Currently, there is a hold on deportations until the first part of January. This will not be enough time for the effected countries to get their feet back on the ground. They need several years of protected status. They also need to be free in this country and not held in detention by the Immigration Service. The other part to this is to push for humanitarian parole. This would allow people who are undocumented or distant relatives to petition the INS to allow family members to enter the United States and live here until it is safe to return to their country of origin. My understanding is that U.S. Attorney General Janet Reno has the power to make these decisions. Please contact her and urge her to grant Temporary Protective Status and Humanitarian Parole to the countries hit by these disasters.

Finally, we will need to organize, over time, many relief efforts for those suffering in Central America and beyond. It is going to take years for these people to get back on their feet and more years to just come back to where they were before the hurricanes hit. We have no idea. This disaster hit the poor. The rich still have their homes and money in banks. The poor have become poorer. With your help and the help of thousands all over the world, we can make a difference.

Addresses

Hurricane Relief

American Red Cross
Disaster Relief for Hurricane Victims
2116 Grand Ave
Des Moines IA 50312
Phone: 515-243-7681

Catholic Relief Services
Disaster Relief for Hurricane Victims
Social Justice Office
c/o 601 Grand Ave
Des Moines IA 50309

Debt Reduction

Senator Tom Harkin
733 Federal Bldg
210 Walnut St
Des Moines IA 50309
Phone: 515-284-4574
Fax: 515-284-4937

Senator Charles Grassley
721 Federal Bldg
210 Walnut St
Des Moines IA 50309
Phone: 515-284-4890
Fax: 515-284-4059

Rep. Greg Ganske
Iowa Office
7th Floor Federal Bldg
210 Walnut St
Des Moines IA 50309
Phone: 515-284-4634
Fax: 515-280-1412

Michael Camdessus
Managing Director,
International Monetary Fund
Phone: 202-623-7000
Fax: 202-623-4661

James Wolfensohn
President, World Bank Group
Phone: 202-458-1114
Fax: 202-522-0355

Robert Rubin
U.S. Secretary of the Treasury
Phone: 202-622-2000
Fax: 202-622-0073

Immigration

Janet Reno
US Dept of Justice
950 Pennsylvania Ave
Washington DC 20530-0001

Please join us for
Friday Evening Liturgy

7:30 p.m.

Dingman House, 1310 - 7th St.

Celebrate the Eucharist and spend time with friends

Announcements!!

There will be no mass on Friday, December 25, 1998 or January 1, 1999.

We will host a musical jam session that we've dubbed "The After-Mass" on the second and fourth Friday of the month following liturgy (about 8:30 p.m.) starting in January.



**You shall find him wracked by hunger
and dying in the Third World.**



**Feast of the
Holy Innocents
Retreat &
Witness
Dec. 26-28, 1998
Omaha NE**

Contact: Michael Sprong
515-246-9887
or
Jo Peterson
402-556-9057

Infant Narrative . . .

Continued from page 1
troopers to Bethlehem with a death squad assignment: kill all male children under the age of two years. Sure, there will be some innocent victims, "collateral damage." It can't be helped — a regrettable, but necessary outcome for a shrewd and politically expedient move.

Herod does nothing out of the ordinary here; any other political operative would do the same. Herod represents the ways of the world, how the "powers and principalities" will respond to the underlying threat that Jesus and his message pose.

**Scene Five:
Return from Egypt**
Matt. 2:19-23: Herod dies, all tyrants do. An angel tells Joseph in a dream that it's safe to bring the child home, but not to Beth-

lehem. Herod's son reigns there, they go to Nazareth instead. It will be safer there. Like Moses "up from Egypt" Matthew's Jesus is in place, on the same page as Mark, Luke and John, in Nazareth ready to connect with John the Baptist when his time comes.

Dec 28 — Feast of the Holy Innocents

This year marks the 20th year that there will be a witness and "line crossing" at Offutt Air Force Base in Bellevue, Nebraska. Offutt AFB is the home of the Strategic Command Headquarters (StratCom), formerly the Strategic Air Command. StratCom is the operational command post for all U.S. strategic nuclear weapons. There is more destructive power than we can comprehend under the command

of StratCom.

I've participated in this Feast of the Holy Innocents witness and line crossing every year since 1978, except when I've been in prison. The witness is always preceded by a retreat in which the infant narrative of Matthew's Gospel is studied, prayed upon and acted upon at the gates of Offutt AFB.

Each year this retreat and witness helps to refocus and reclaim the original edge and challenge of Matthew's Christmas story. The rules of political engagement that moved King Herod to kill the children of Bethlehem are very much in place today.

Just as the Roman Empire was the political force backing King Herod, today the United States and its forces like StratCom are the political force back-

ing up modern day King Herod's around the globe. If you don't think so, ask the children and mothers of Iraq. Did you know that more children have died in Iraq because of the U.S.-led sanctions than all people killed during Desert Storm?

The truth is, the Matthew Christmas story is relived every day in every corner of the world. The innocent are sacrificed and the Christ child is hunted down in countless places and in countless ways.

Don't be fooled by our nations official observance of Christmas. Christmas U.S.A. is more a commercial and economic observance than any kind of spiritual or holy observance. It serves more to disguise and cover up the true meaning of Jesus' birthday.

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Newsletter of the Des Moines Catholic Worker Community
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Bishop Dingman House
1310 7th St.
(515) 243-0765

Community members:
Meredith Bruns
Anna Marie Waltner

Msgr. Ligutti House
1301 8th St.
(515) 246-9887

Community members:
Ed Bloomer
Beth Preheim
Norman Searah
Michael Sprong

Lazarus House
1317 8th St.
(515) 246-1499

Community Members:
The Dawson-Ngamo family: Carla, Richard, Julius, Joshua and Jordan

Community NEWS

Carla Dawson-Ngamo

Hello! Everyone. I hope this article finds every one in a joyous mood. I know what is going on with the weather, but thank God. We have been very blessed this year. The Dingman House roof has been replaced. Had some people hear our and they came through. I know who you are and to give thanks. God Bless! We are now working on the foundation at Lazarus House. We know it will be done, but with every dollar toward repair that we give us with one less dollar to pay utility bills. So any and all you can give will be gratefully appreciated.

Michael Burrell is now in Tennessee with his family. We miss him and his family in our house.

Meredith has been away for Thanksgiving and for her sister's wedding in New York. We hope she will all rested up because we have plans for her when she comes back.

Beth and Michael have been busy what with getting out letters for different things going on. Thanks to them it is faster and easier to get the

via pacis out. They have also been great at taking shifts, picking up produce and anything else that needs done. I sometimes wonder how we got along before they came. They are indeed a blessing to the Worker.

AnnaMarie is like a breath of fresh air to us. She is still working on her culinary skills, but in time she'll be great. It was a wonderful experience to meet her family from South Dakota. Her mother, father, brother, aunt and uncle were here to share Thanksgiving and we had a wonderful time peeling potatoes and peeling eggshells. Thank you all for your generosity in sharing your time and talents. Come back any time, we'd love to have you again.

Eddie has been a working horse. He almost single-handedly filled two dumpsters with old shingles that were torn off the roof. No, really he had help, but he is always the backbone of many house clean up projects. He is truly the example of a Catholic Worker. God Bless.

Norman is having more freedom now. He has been using Frank's car while Frank is locked up. Read his article to see what he's up to.

Julius had a wonderful first

year at tackle football. He had an excellent report card. He has a 3.3 GPA. He is really enjoying school. He is now playing basketball. He alone keeps me busy enough for five children.

Joshua just finished flag football. His team was runner-up in the elementary school division. He has been applying himself more to his school work. He and Jordan had a nice break from school in October. He and Jordan were at the YMCA having a blast.

Jordan has really grown up in the past six months. He made me very proud just the other day. A little boy hit him and Jordan did not hit back. That is a true test of his Worker upbringing. I knew all along that growing up here was the best life I could give them.

I have been very busy. We had a marvelous Thanksgiving — thanks to Fr. Kevin and Fr. Dave, Jack and Nora, for all your wonderful help. We now have one more Catholic Worker tradition. I had a blast in New York with my sister Jackie. Thanks to all the Worker and friends who made our stay great. Thanks to Mary Ann and Jeff for the great pie and atmosphere. We miss everyone and hope you had a wonderful Thanksgiving. Give our love to everyone. Thanks for the great hospitality. I hope everyone will have a blessed Holiday. Remember that it's not so much to receive as to give. God Bless and Happy Holiday.

Thanks & Acknowledgements

Dingman House has a new roof! The roof was finished in early November thanks to Carl Laack of C&L Repair. Carl not only gave us an incredibly good deal, but also provided employment for some of our guests. If you need a roof replaced, we strongly encourage you to contact Carl at: C&L Repair, 918 E 17th St, Des Moines IA 50316, 515-263-3220

Additionally, this fall we have been focusing on renovating Ligutti House and repairing the foundation of Lazarus House. This work has been done by Mike Alspach, a small, independent contractor who, along with his fiancée Maureen, have become good friends of the house. Mike is always looking for more work as he builds a "clientele" in the Des Moines area. If you have a job that you would like Mike to bid on, contact the DMCW at 243-0765.

Finally, we want to thank those supporters who have been so helpful throughout the entire year: Susan Barnes, Lynn Tyler, St. Andrews Church, Our Lady of Immaculate Heart Church, Christ the King Church, St. Pius Church, Indianola churches, Drake Newman Parish, St. Thomas Aquinas Church, Norwalk Methodist Church, Sacred Heart Church, Capitol City Fruit Company, Summertime Potato Company, supportive priests of the Des Moines Catholic Diocese (you know who you are), and the regular Friday night liturgy crowd.

We apologize for anyone that we've missed. Please know that you are all in our thoughts and prayers. Thanks for all you have done and all you will do to help our guests and us.

Blessings and peace,
— The Des Moines Catholic Worker Community

Norman's Whereabouts

Norman Searah

Christmas is coming, and we just got done with Thanksgiving. The weather has been good: no snow, no bad storms. It's been like fall.

I've been busy helping the community on some projects like putting in new tiles in Dingman House, helping shelving and building to helping Mike and Beth.

Right now I'm working on a room and at the same time hanging a chain with a ball in a room out of bass wood for a person at work.

I'm thinking of painting my

room, the walls, trim and ceiling ... maybe a mauve of some kind.

As for my diabetes, I'm no longer going to my diabetes therapy group because the funds ran out and the people that organized it as a project gave up on it due to lack of interest from people who could have been helped. So they're going to another state to try it. But in the meantime I'm going to use what I've learned and share it with others like me.

It was good to hear that no one really got arrested at the School of Americas, where we train men and perhaps women from Central and South America on how to oppress, to torture,

and even to kill their own people. I sometimes wonder if Saddam Hussein was by any foolish thought a student at the School of Americas. I believe SOA should be shut down and stop teaching others how to kill their own. I also believe that as a planet of human beings we need to put an end to our wars, our need to protect ourselves with weapons of mass destruction.

I believe that there are other ways of preventing wars in this world, ways that are heart-breaking.

I believe we all want the same things as everyone else: peace on earth, a life to live, to

work and play, food to live on, to speak and listen to, to love and be loved, to be someone.

I would like to say to those that took medical supplies to the people and not to the government of Iraq and to those that take medical goods to Central America: Thank you.

Even though I'm still serving a five-year probation sentence and gave my word not to cross the line at Offutt AFB, I can still support people and I can still

speak out on things.

I would like to wish you and our world a peaceful and whatever peace one may find in the new year to come along with whatever true love that they may find on Christmas Day.

And may the peace and love of the Lord, Creator, and whatever you may believe, be with you.

Thank you, Norman.

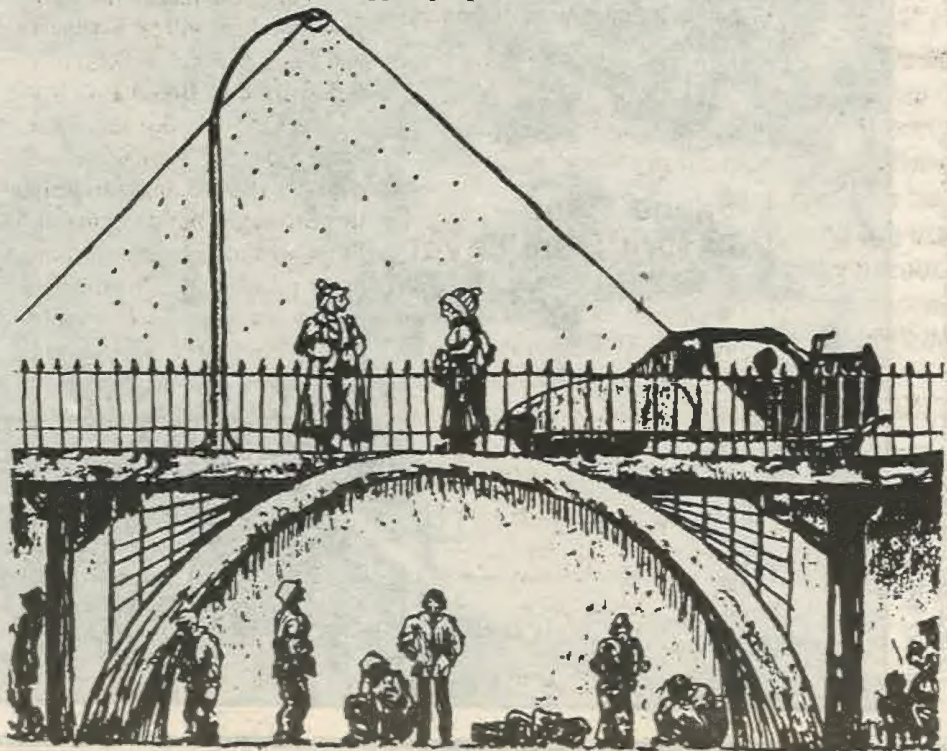
School of the Americas Action Update

In November two of our community members, AnnaMarie Kiltner and Meredith Bruns, travelled to Columbus, Georgia to protest the School of Americas at Ft. Benning.

They were among the crowd of over 7,000 people who gathered to demand that the United States government shut down this school which is notorious for training Latin American soldiers in torture and death squad techniques and other tactics to intimidate civilians in their countries.

Nearly 2,400 people risked arrest by walking onto the Ft. Benning property. Ft. Benning personnel were overwhelmed by the numbers and, unlike past actions, declined to make arrests. Some protestors were issued ban-and-bar letters, but most were simply placed on buses, driven away from the demonstration site and then released.

For more information on the ongoing campaign to close the School of the Americas, contact: SOA Watch, PO Box 4566, Washington, DC 20017.



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Fritz Eichenberg



"Into this world, this deoriented inn, in which there is absolutely no room for him at all, Christ has come uninvited. But because he cannot be at home in it, because he is out of place in it, his place is with those others for whom there is no room. His place is with those who do not belong, who are rejected by power because they are regarded as weak, those who are discredited, who are denied the status of persons, who are tortured, bombed and exterminated. With those for whom there is no room, Christ is present in the world."

— Thomas Merton